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ABSTRACT

Kansas State University faculty members and students were asked about factors affecting "grade inflation" as well as consequences of changing academic polices relating to it. Responses were received from 188 faculty members and 369 students. Most faculty members viewed grade inflation negatively, and felt that it was caused by a combination of factors including lenient policies (regarding course withdrawal, course re-takes, and credit/no credit options); faculty intimidation resulting from student ratings of teachers or from pressures to retain high enrollments; faculty role conflicts; and innovation approaches to education. Students were more apt to view grade inflation positively, probably reflecting their belief that several current academic policies serve student interests. These policies have been used by students to improve their academic records and to explore new academic interests. It is concluded that grade inflation can be partially controlled by academic policies. However, policy-makers need to judge whether the total effect of a given policy (including its unintended side effects) serve to improve or reduce the quality of education provided by the institution. Faculty and student questionnaires are appended. (Author/LBH)

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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MANHATTAN, KANSAS

Office of Educational Research

Kansas State University

Research Report #36

GRADE INFLATION AT KSU:
STUDENT AND FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

Donald P. Hoyt and Jeffrey G. Reed

June 1976

GRADE INFLATION AT KSU: STUDENT AND FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

ABSTRACT

KSU faculty members and students were asked about factors affecting "grade inflation", as well as consequences of changing academic policies relating to it. Responses were received from 188 faculty members (75% of the sample) and 369 students (94.1% of the sample).

Most faculty members believed grade inflation was a "bad thing", caused by a combination of factors including lenient policies (regarding course withdrawal, course re-takes, and credit/no credit options); faculty intimidation resulting from student ratings of teachers or from pressures to retain high enrollments; faculty role conflicts; and innovative approaches to education. Respondents believed that they were less influenced than their colleagues in these matters, but sizeable numbers acknowledged that their own grade distributions were affected by the liberal withdrawal policy and by the conflict between their role as "helper" and their role as "evaluator". Although faculty ratings suggested that a tightening of grading standards would have some beneficial educational effects, the majority favored retention of three academic policies which have contributed to "grade inflation".

Students were more inclined to view "grade inflation" as a "good thing" (30 percent) than as a "bad thing" (23 percent). This probably reflects their belief that several current academic policies serve student interests (credit/no credit; extended course withdrawal period; re-take opportunity). These policies have been used by students to improve their academic records and to explore new academic interests. While some abuses were acknowledged, an overwhelming majority of students recommended retaining them.

"Grade inflation" can be partially controlled by academic policies. Policy makers need to judge, therefore, whether the total effects of a given policy (including its unintended side effects) serve to improve or reduce the quality of education provided by the institution.

GRADE INFLATION AT KSU: STUDENT AND FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

Donald P. Hoyt and Jeffrey G. Reed
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The phenomenon of "grade inflation" has created considerable controversy within higher education circles (e.g., Mayville, 1975; Teaching Research, 1975). That the average college grade has been rising rapidly during the past 6 to 8 years on campus after campus has been widely documented. At Kansas State University, for example, the mean grade earned increased from 2.41 in 1964 to 2.85 in 1974 (Gerritz, 1975). These increases have occurred during a time when the average scholastic aptitude test scores for entering freshmen have been declining (Munday, 1976).

Warren (1971) has identified many deficiencies in the traditional grading system. Among them are: the infidelity of the grading system, i.e., the impossibility of accurately representing academic performance by simple letter grade symbols; the insensitivity of a single grade to represent the multidimensional performance of a student; the questionable reliability and validity of a particular grade in a particular course; the focus in grading on summative rather than on formative evaluation of students; and the creation of conflict between the faculty roles of "mentor/teacher" and "evaluator/judge". As a result Warren cited several unintended effects of grading: a distortion of the learning process where the only reward is the grade; a distortion of teaching, i.e. teaching for the test; manipulation of student attitudes and behavior with the side effects of competition and cheating; and negative social effects.

Criticisms such as Warren's have stimulated a variety of suggestions for alternative grading procedures, e.g., pass/fail grading (in part or in toto); pass/no record grading; descriptive grading; symbolic/descriptive grading combinations (Collins and Nickel, 1974). There have been many recommendations to increase the flexibility of academic policies, including those which indirectly affect grades.

At Kansas State University, several modifications to traditional grading policies have been made. The most important of these have been the establishment of a limited credit/no credit option, the extension of the period during which a course may be dropped without that action appearing on the transcript, and the enactment of a policy permitting a student to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in computing the grade point average (GPA).

The present investigation was undertaken at the request of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate. A number of faculty members had expressed concern to committee members about "grade inflation" at KSU, and its assumed negative effect on academic standards. Because the Academic Affairs Committee considers policies which may affect "grade inflation", it was natural for it to seek information about the causes of and reactions to "grade inflation".

A subcommittee of the Academic Affairs Committee explored the problem through discussion, debate, and shared experience. It developed a number of "hypotheses" about the problem of grade inflation, and inevitably, considered possible consequences if one or another "corrective" action were taken. Near the end of the fall semester of 1975, it determined that additional information was needed. Assistance from the Office of Educational Research was requested.

The research problem involved evaluating various assumptions about the causes of grade inflation at KSU and predicting the consequences of possible alternative actions. The subcommittee had identified most of the possible explanations, and many of the consequences which might be anticipated if one or another policy change were made. To determine the credibility of those explanations and the potential consequences of policy changes, the Committee asked that the experiences and opinions of faculty members and students be solicited and summarized. It considered the desirability of additional input from graduate/professional school admission committees and from employers of college graduates, but decided not to seek these because of cost and time constraints.

PROCEDURES

Samples

Input from both students and faculty members was desired. However, a purely random sample of either group was considered undesirable for the following reasons:

Faculty

1. The views of part-time faculty members were felt to be less relevant than those of persons with full-time appointments. Hence, only the latter were considered.
2. The problem was believed to be of little concern to the College of Veterinary Medicine. Hence, its faculty were not considered.
3. Since one purpose was to learn of the experience faculty members had at KSU, new faculty members were excluded from the sample.

Names were drawn at random from a list of the remaining faculty members. The sample was stratified by college, in proportion to each's full-time equivalent (FTE) instructional positions. A total of 250 faculty members was selected by this process.

Students

1. Since freshmen and new transfer students had little experience with these matters at KSU, they were excluded from the sample.
2. Students in the College of Veterinary Medicine and in the Graduate School were excluded on the grounds that the issue was primarily an undergraduate concern.
3. Part-time students were excluded on the grounds of their atypicality.

Of the remainder, a random sample was drawn by class. A total of 100 were drawn from both the sophomore and junior classes; 200 were drawn from the senior class. The intent was to give double weight to the senior class since (a) its members were most experienced, and (b) they were less likely to be subject to charges of "conflict of interest"--i.e., by the time changes could be made, they would have graduated.

Survey Forms

Separate two page questionnaires were prepared for students and for faculty members. Both forms asked the respondent how he/she viewed "grade inflation" (good thing vs. bad thing). They also asked for reactions to proposals to rescind each of three policies which may directly affect grades at KSU (credit/no credit grading; the extended course withdrawal period; and the course re-take opportunity).

In addition, the faculty form identified ten possible "causes" of grade inflation (including the three policies noted above), and asked respondents to estimate the influence of each on (a) the undergraduate grades they gave last year, and (b) the undergraduate grades given by the faculty in general. Six possible "consequences" of tighter grading standards were stated as "positions", and respondents indicated whether or not each was "convincing". Finally, faculty members were asked to respond to a proposed new grading policy. Under this proposal, the transcript would show both the student's letter grade and the percentage of grades in that class which were lower. Thus, if half the class received "A's", the A student would have an "A-50" recorded on the transcript, while if only ten percent received an "A", the record would read "A-90".

The student form asked a number of questions besides those mentioned earlier. There were 13 questions concerning the personal consequences of making grading standards more severe. Another 13 questions dealt with student experiences with credit/no credit courses, "late withdrawal", and course re-takes. Two questions dealt with the relationship between teachers' grading standards and student ratings of instruction, and one asked about student attempts to influence grades by evoking the professor's sympathy or concern.

Copies of both questionnaires are included in the Appendix.

Analyses

Since the main purpose of the surveys was to learn about the experiences, attitudes, and recommendations of the student and faculty populations represented by our samples, the chief analyses consisted of frequency counts and the calculation of percentages. It was of secondary interest to know whether or not the response pattern was contingent on one or another characteristic of the respondent. Therefore, chi-square analyses were also performed using the following as contingencies:

(1-3) Faculty recommendations (approval vs. disapproval) regarding the proposal to rescind each of three policies (credit/no credit options, 9-week withdrawal period, course re-take policy).
(4) Student class (sophomore, junior, senior).
(5) Student overall GPA (<2.5, 2.5-2.9, 3.0+).
(6) Student GPA in the major field (<3.0, 3.0-3.49, 3.5+).

RESULTS

Faculty Views

Of the 250 faculty members selected, 188 (75.2 percent) returned completed forms. Since no followup was attempted, this represents an unusually high return rate, and suggests a high degree of faculty interest in the topic.

Most of the results for the faculty respondents are displayed in Table 1. The last item in this table shows that most faculty members (62 percent) regarded grade inflation as a "bad thing", while only 2 percent perceived it as a "good thing". Clearly, it represents a matter of concern to the faculty.

Each of the ten factors which had been hypothesized as a potential influence on grading practices was believed to influence the faculty, as a whole, at least to some degree. (See Part I, Table 1.) Three factors were rated as "a substantial influence" by a plurality of respondents--the extended period for withdrawing from a course with no grade (Item G), the belief that grading practices will influence student ratings of the faculty (Item E), and the system which ties the number of faculty positions directly to enrollment (Item D). For the other seven items, the modal response was "some influence". On three of these, persons selecting "substantial influence" clearly outnumbered those rating the item "of no importance" (the re-take policy, Item H; contract grading, Item I; and attempts to increase social relevance, Item J). For the remaining four items, the persons selecting these two extremes were about equal (admission to graduate or professional schools, Item A; critiques of grades, Item B; conflicts in faculty roles, Item C; and the credit/no credit option, Item F).

Not surprisingly, however, respondents were much less likely to acknowledge that these factors influenced their own grading practices. In fact, a majority denied that their grades were influenced by eight of the ten. The two factors where half or more of the respondents acknowledged at least "some influence" on their own grading practices were Item C (conflict between the roles of "teacher/helper" and "evaluator/judge"), and Item G (the policy which extends the period for withdrawing from a course with no grade).

Of the six "arguments" regarding the effects of tighter (less lenient) grading standards, three described "positive" consequences (enhancing KSU's academic reputation, rekindling academic motivation, providing students with a more realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the world). The majority found each of these arguments at least "worth considering", and 51 percent regarded the last one as "convincing". On the other hand, the majority regarded all three

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF FACULTY REACTIONS TO KSU GRADING PRACTICES (IN PERCENTAGES)

I. Faculty Opinions Regarding the Effect of Various Factors on Grades at KSU

	Of No Influence	Of Some Influence	A Subst. Influence	Don't Know	Not Relevant
A. The high emphasis graduate and professional school admission policies place on undergraduate GPA					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	18	45	23	14	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	67	22	4	3	5
B. Critiques which denigrate the significance of grades (imprecise, inconsistent, not related to later success,etc)					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	16	48	18	19	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	60	26	5	4	5
C. Conflict between the faculty member's role of "teacher/helper" and that of "evaluator/judge"					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	17	43	17	24	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	36	39	14	6	5
D. The system which ties fac. positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs" to fac. retrenchment)					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	10	34	41	15	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	58	23	10	4	5
E. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are higher.					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	9	36	45	11	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	57	26	9	4	5
F. The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	20	38	26	16	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	62	15	10	8	5
G. The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term.					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	16	24	46	14	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	46	20	23	6	5
H. The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA.					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	17	34	31	19	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	59	19	10	9	5
I. The use of "contract grading" whereby achievement required for a given grade is specified in advance.					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	10	39	23	28	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	62	13	10	11	5
J. Proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipl. to social issues (or to otherwise incr. "relevance").					
Effect on undergraduate faculty as a whole	15	30	32	23	-
Effect on my undergraduate grading	65	16	6	8	5

II. Persuasiveness of Various Arguments Regarding the Impact of Tighter Grading Standards

	Convincing	Worth Considering	Not Convincing
A. Tighter standards will enhance our reputation as an academic institution and will thus aid student recruitment.	17	45	39
B. Tighter standards will be unfair to KSU graduates seeking admission to graduate or professional schools since other institutions will probably not "deflate" grades	8	26	66
C. Tighter standards will serve to rekindle academic effort and motivation among KSU students	32	42	26
D. Tighter standards will encourage many KSU students to enroll in less demanding institutions	15	34	52
E. Tighter standards will give students a more realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the world.	51	26	23
F. Tighter standards will discourage students from exploring academic interests outside their area of concentration.	18	25	57

III. Reactions to Proposal to Add a "Percentile Rank of Grade" to the Transcript

Strongly favor=13. Inclined to favor=27. Undecided=17. Inclined to oppose=25. Strongly opposed=18.

IV. General Reaction to "Grade Inflation" at KSU

Bad Thing=62. Good Thing=2. Neither bad nor good=28. No opinion=9.

of the arguments describing negative consequences as "not convincing" (would unfairly exclude KSU students from graduate/professional schools, would encourage KSU students to transfer, would discourage students from exploring broad academic opportunities).

Faculty members were also asked about three existing academic policies and one proposed policy (adding a "percentile rank of the grade" to the transcript). Table 1 gives results only for the latter (Part III). Respondents were about evenly divided in their opinions about adding an approximate "percentile rank" to each grade--40 percent were in favor, 43 percent were opposed, and 17 percent were undecided. On the question of rescinding the three existing policies, the following results were obtained:

		Favor Rescinding	Favor Continuing	Undecided, Don't care
a.	Credit/no credit	24 %	64 %	12 %
b.	9-week withdrawal	38 %	50 %	12 %
c.	Course re-take	35 %	52 %	14 %

Two groups were formed on the basis of responses to these three policies--those in favor of rescinding the particular policy, and those in favor of continuing that particular policy. (Those answering undecided or don't care were excluded from these analyses.) Chi-square was used to determine if the two groups responded differently to the other questions. Three sets of analyses were thus computed, one for each policy statment. Results are summarized in Tables 2 and 2A, 3 and 3A, and 4 and 4A. Tables 2, 3, and 4 provide information on the ten factors presumably influencing faculty grading standards, while Tables 2A, 3A, and 4A report the remaining results.

On the basis of findings reported in Tables 2, 3, and 4, it is clear that the group favoring no change in existing policies was less likely to believe that "extraneous conditions" influenced grades. Factors E and F (influence of grades on student ratings, credit/no credit option) were consistently regarded as more potent influences by those favoring rescinding. And for two of the tables, a similar conclusion was reached for Factors D (relationship of faculty positions to enrollment), G (opportunity to postpone course withdrawal), H (opportunity to re-take the course), and J (the proliferation of "relevant" courses).

Those favoring rescinding a given policy also tended to find the positive arguments for tightening grading standards more convincing than the group favoring no change (Tables 2A, 3A, and 4A). In all three tables, arguments A and E (tighter standards will enhance our academic reputation, will provide students with a more realistic appraisal of their ability) were convincing to about twice as many who favored rescinding the policies as those who favored continuing the policies. The two groups had relatively similar views on the negative arguments, although in two of the three comparisons the group favoring no change was more impressed by argument F (tighter standards will inhibit academic exploration) than were those favoring rescinding the policies.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF FACULTY MEMBERS FAVORING "RESCINDING" AND THOSE FAVORING "CONTINUING" THE "NON-GRADED" POLICY: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADES AT KSU
(All data given in percentages)

Factors Potentially Influencing Grades	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups: Effect on Other Fac.	Effect on Respondent
1. The high emphasis graduate and professional school admission policies place on undergraduate GPA.	NS	NS
2. Critiques which denigrate the significance of grades (imprecise, inconsistent, unrelated to later success, etc.)	NS	NS
3. Conflict between the faculty member's role of "teacher/helper" and that of "evaluator/judge".	NS	NS
4. The system which ties faculty positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs" to faculty retrenchment).	NS	NS
5. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are high.	*	*
6. The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.	**	NS
7. The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term.	NS	*
8. The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA.	NS	NS
9. The use of "contract grading" whereby achievement required for a given grade is specified in advance.	NS	NS
10. Proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipline to social issues (or to otherwise increase "relevance").	**	NS

* χ^2 significant; $p < .05$ (see details below).
** χ^2 significant; $p < .01$ (see details below).
NS no significant difference between comparison groups.

Factors Perceived Differently By The Two Groups	Of No Influence Rsnd/Cont	Of Some Influence Rsnd/Cont	Substant. Influence Rsnd/Cont	DK; Irrelevant Rsnd/Cont
5. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are high.				
Effect on other faculty	4/10	22/40	64/39	9/11
Effect on respondent	42/64	38/22	13/ 7	7/ 7
6. The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.				
Effect on other faculty	4/28	44/36	44/18	7/18
7. The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term.				
Effect on respondent	36/52	24/21	29/21	11/ 7
10. Proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipline to social issues (or otherwise make "relevant").				
Effect on other faculty	13/17	29/33	51/24	7/26

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF FACULTY MEMBERS FAVORING "RESCINDING" AND THOSE FAVORING "CONTINUING" THE POLICY PERMITTING STUDENTS TO WITHDRAW WITH NO GRADE THROUGH THE FIRST 9 WEEKS OF THE TERM: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADES AT KSU
(All data given in percentages)

Factors Potentially Influencing Grades	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups: Effect on Other Fac.	Effect on Respondent
1. The high emphasis graduate and professional school admission policies place on undergraduate GPA.	NS	NS
2. Critiques which denigrate the significance of grades (imprecise, inconsistent, unrelated to later success, etc.)	*	*
3. Conflict between the faculty member's role of "teacher/helper" and that of "evaluator/judge".	NS	NS
4. The system which ties faculty positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs" to faculty retrenchment).	**	*
5. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are high.	*	NS
6 The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.	*	*
7. The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term.	**	**
8. The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA.	*	NS
9. The use of "contract grading" whereby achievement required for a given grade is specified in advance.	NS	NS
10. Proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipline to social issues (or to otherwise increase "relevance").	NS	NS

* χ^2 significant; $p < .05$ (see details below).
** χ^2 significant; $p < .01$ (see details below).
NS no significant difference between comparison groups.

Factors Perceived Differently By The Two Groups	Of No Influence Rsnd/Cont	Of Some Influence Rsnd/Cont	Substant. Influence Rsnd/Cont	DK; Irrelevant Rsnd/Cont
2. Critiques which denigrate the significance of grades (imprecise, inconsistent, unrelated to later success)				
Effect on other faculty	8/22	56/43	22/14	14/22
Effect on respondent	68/59	29/22	1/10	1/ 2
4. The system which ties faculty positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs' to faculty retrenchment).				
Effect on other faculty	7/14	36/31	54/30	3/25
Effect on respondent	54/64	33/16	10/ 9	3/ 3
5. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are high.				
Effect on other faculty	7/12	29/40	58/34	6/14
6. The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.				
Effect on other faculty	12/26	39/34	38/20	11/19
Effect on respondent	57/64	18/15	14/10	11/ 3
7. The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term.				
Effect on other faculty	6/24	18/26	67/36	10/15
Effect on respondent	33/57	25/15	32/19	10/ 1
8. The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA.				
Effect on other faculty	8/23	35/30	42/27	15/20

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF FACULTY MEMBERS FAVORING "RESCINDING" AND THOSE FAVORING "CONTINUING" THE POLICY PERMITTING STUDENTS TO RE-TAKE ANY COURSE WITH ONLY THE LAST GRADE COUNTING IN THE GPA: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADES AT KSU
(All data given in percentages)

Factors Potentially Influencing Grades	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups: Effect on Other Fac.	Effect on Respondent
1. The high emphasis graduate and professional school admission policies place on undergraduate GPA.	NS	NS
2. Critiques which denigrate the significance of grades (imprecise, inconsistent, unrelated to later success, etc.)	NS	NS
3. Conflict between the faculty member's role of "teacher/helper" and that of "evaluator/judge".	NS	NS
4. The system which ties faculty positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs" to faculty retrenchment).	**	NS
5. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are high.	*	NS
6. The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.	*	NS
7. The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term.	NS	NS
8. The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA.	NS	*
9. The use of "contract grading" whereby achievement required for a given grade is specified in advance.	NS	NS
10. Proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipline to social issues (or to otherwise increase "relevance").	*	NS

* χ^2 significant; $p < .05$ (see details below).
** χ^2 significant; $p < .01$ (see details below).
NS no significant difference between comparison groups.

Factors Perceived Differently By The Two Groups	Of No Influence Rsnd/Cont	Of Some Influence Rsnd/Cont	Substant. Influence Rsnd/Cont	DK; Irrelevant Rsnd/Cont
4. The system which ties faculty positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs" to faculty retrenchment). Effect on other faculty	6/13	28/39	60/32	6/16
5. The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are high. Effect on other faculty	5/10	23/43	63/37	9/ 9
6. The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area. Effect on other faculty	12/25	42/37	35/20	11/19
8. The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA. Effect on respondent	52/66	17/20	17/ 4	11/ 5
10. Proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipline to social issues (or otherwise make "relevant") Effect on other faculty	20/14	22/36	45/27	14/23

TABLE 2A

COMPARISON OF FACULTY MEMBERS FAVORING "RESCINDING" AND THOSE FAVORING "CONTINUING" THE "NON-GRADED" POLICY: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADES AT KSU
(All data given in percentages)

Persuasiveness of Arguments	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups: Convincing Rescnd/Contin	Argument is Worth Considering Rescnd/Contin	Not Convincing Rescnd/Contin	Probabil.
1. Tighter standards will enhance our reputation as an academic institution and will thus aid student recruitment.	27/14	49/42	24/44	*
2. Tighter standards will be unfair to KSU graduates seeking admission to graduate or professional schools since other institutions will probably not "deflate" grades.				NS
3. Tighter standards will serve to rekindle academic effort and motivation among KSU students.				NS
4. Tighter standards will encourage many KSU students to enroll in less demanding institutions.	18/14	20/41	62/45	*
5. Tighter standards will give students a more realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the world.	64/47	27/24	9/29	*
6. Tighter standards will discourage students from exploring academic interests outside their area of concentration.	9/23	18/27	73/50	*

* significant; $p < .05$
NS no significant difference between comparison groups.

7. Reactions to the proposal to add a "percentile rank" to the transcript. — no significant difference between groups.

	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups: Bad Thing Rscnd/Contn	Good Thing Rscnd/Contn	Neither Bad nor Good Rscnd/Contn	No Opinion Rscnd/Contn	Probab.
8. General Reaction to "Grade Inflation" at KSU.	82/54	2/2	13/36	2/8	**

** significant; $p < .01$

TABLE 3A

COMPARISON OF FACULTY MEMBERS FAVORING "RESCINDING" AND THOSE FAVORING "CONTINUING" THE POLICY PERMITTING STUDENTS TO WITHDRAW WITH NO GRADE THROUGH THE FIRST 9 WEEKS OF THE TERM· PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADES AT KSU
(All data given in percentages)

	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups			
Persuasiveness of Arguments	Convincing Rescnd/Contin	Argument is Worth Considering Rescnd/Contin	Not Convincing Rescnd/Contin	Probabil.
1. Tighter standards will enhance our reputation as an academic institution and will thus aid student recruitment.	28/10	43/45	29/45	**
2. Tighter standards will be unfair to KSU graduates seeking admission to graduate or professional schools since other institutions will probably not "deflate" grades.				NS
3. Tighter standards will serve to rekindle academic effort and motivation among KSU students.	43/23	44/45	13/32	**
4. Tighter standards will encourage many KSU students to enroll in less demanding institutions.				NS
5. Tighter standards will give students a more realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the world.	67/42	19/29	14/29	**
6. Tighter standards will discourage students from exploring academic interests outside their area of concentration.	8/29	21/27	71/44	**

** χ^2 significant; $p < .01$
NS no significant difference between comparison groups.

7. Reactions to the proposal to add a "percentile rank" to the transcript. — no significant difference between groups.

	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups				
	Bad Thing Rscnd/Contn	Good Thing Rscnd/Contn	Neither Bad nor Good Rscnd/Contn	No Opinion Rscnd/Contn	Probab.
8. General Reaction to "Grade Inflation" at KSU.	78/53	4/ 1	11/40	7/6	**

** χ^2 significant; $p < .01$

TABLE 4A

COMPARISON OF FACULTY MEMBERS FAVORING "RESCINDING" AND THOSE FAVORING "CONTINUING" THE POLICY PERMITTING STUDENTS TO RE-TAKE ANY COURSE WITH ONLY THE LAST GRADE COUNTING IN THE GPA: PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADES AT KSU
(All data given in percentages)

	Comparison of "Rescind" and "Continue Policy" Groups			
Persuasiveness of Arguments	Convincing Rescnd/Contin	Argument is Worth Considering Rescnd/Contin	Not Convincing Rescnd/Contin	Probabil.
1. Tighter standards will enhance our reputation as an academic institution and will thus aid student recruitment.	26/11	49/42	25/46	**
2. Tighter standards will be unfair to KSU graduates seeking admission to graduate or professional schools since other institutions will probably not "deflate" grades.				NS
3. Tighter standards will serve to rekindle academic effort and motivation among KSU students.	49/22	34/50	17/28	**
4. Tighter standards will encourage many KSU students to enroll in less demanding institutions.				NS
5. Tighter standards will give students a more realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the world.	74/39	17/30	9/31	**
6. Tighter standards will discourage students from exploring academic interests outside their area of concentration.				NS

	Strongly Favor Rcnd/Cont	Inclined to Favor Rcnd/Cont	Undecided Rcnd/Cont	Inclined to Oppose Rcnd/Cont	Strongly Opposed Rcnd/Cont	Probab.
7. Reactions to the proposal to add a "percentile rank" to the transcript.	17/13	38/18	17/12	15/33	12/24	**

	Bad Thing Rscnd/Contn	Good Thing Rscnd/Contn	Neither Bad nor Good Rscnd/Contn	No Opinion Rscnd/Contn	Probab.
8. General Reaction to "Grade Inflation" at KSU.	78/53	4/ 1	11/40	7/6	**

* significant; $p < .05$
** significant; $p < .01$
NS no significant differences between comparison groups

While both groups tended to regard grade inflation as a "bad thing", about 40 percent of those recommending no change regarded it as "neither good nor bad". In contrast, only about 12 percent of the "rescind" group held a similar view.

Student Views

Of the 400 students selected for the study, 2 percent could not be contacted due to faulty addresses. A total of 369 of the remaining 392 (94.1 percent) provided useable replies. The extremely high return rate was probably due to both high student interest, and a vigorous follow-up effort.

Results for all respondents are summarized in Table 5. Comparisons of groups defined on the basis of overall GPA are shown in Tables 6 and 6A, and of those defined on the basis of GPA in their major field in Tables 7 and 7A. Comparisons were also made among sophomores, juniors, and seniors; however, since there were no significant differences among classes, results were not tabled. Data in these five tables are relevant to several questions.

1. What value judgment do students place on the grade inflation phenomenon?

A plurality (41 percent) regarded it as "neither bad nor good"; the remainder were fairly evenly divided between "a good thing" (30 percent) and "a bad thing" (23 percent). There were no significant differences among subgroups.

2. How would tighter grading practices affect students? (Questions 2-12)

There was a tendency for students to believe that their academic effort and satisfaction would be increased (Questions 2 and 8). The only significant subgroup comparison was on Question 8 (satisfaction with the academic challenge at KSU) where those with the highest GPA's in their major were most likely to regard more rigorous grading standards as having a positive effect.

General satisfaction with KSU would apparently be modestly decreased (Questions 3 and 7). There were no subgroup differences in this regard.

The type of academic load students would attempt apparently would be strongly influenced. They would take fewer credits (Question 4), more ungraded courses (Question 5), and they would be more likely to repeat a course (Question 6). The increase of interest in ungraded courses was most pronounced for those with the lowest GPA's.

Relatively few students believed tighter grading standards would jeopardize their academic standing at KSU (Questions 9 and 10), but substantial minorities believed their future educational or career aspirations may be adversely affected (Questions 11 and 12). As expected, the answers to all four of these questions were closely related to students' current GPA, overall (Table 6) or in their major field (Table 7). The lower a student's current GPA, the more threatening was the prospect of stiffer grading practices.

TABLE 5

SUMMARY OF STUDENT REACTIONS TO KSU GRADING PRACTICES (in percentages)

1. How do you regard "grade inflation" at KSU?
   Bad Thing=23 Good Thing=30 Neither=41 Both=1 No Opinion=5

How would tightening KSU Grading Standards affect your:

		Increase	No Effect	Decrease
2.	Academic motivation and effort	43	35	22
3.	Overall satisfaction with KSU	16	45	39
4.	Credit hour load attempted	2	44	55
5.	Desire to take credit/no credit courses	62	35	3
6.	Interest in repeating courses	42	43	15
7.	Willingness to recommend KSU to friends	13	71	16
8.	Satisfaction with the academic challenge at KSU	36	46	18

		Quite Likely	Possibly	Not Likely	Can't Say
9.	Danger of probation or dismissal	4	15	80	2
10.	Transfer to another institution	1	10	84	5
11.	Rejection by Graduate or Professional School	13	36	37	14
12.	Rejection for a job	7	31	45	17

13. Have you attempted to personally influence your instructor for a good grade, by noting the importance of that grade? No=77 Yes=20 Yes, Several times=4

How are your ratings of "Teaching Effectiveness" affected by Instructors who:

		Increase	No Effect	Decrease
14.	tend to grade "leniently"	20	67	13
15.	tend to grade "harshly"	6	52	42

16. Have you enrolled in Non-graded courses at KSU? Yes=71 No=29
17. How many Non-graded courses? 77% of enrollees have taken 3 or less courses

Reactions to experiences with Non-graded Courses:

		Definitely True	More True	More False	Definitely False
18.	Expended less effort than in average graded course	36	42	12	10
19.	Expected poor grade if taken for credit	18	33	29	19
20.	Would not have taken otherwise	13	24	37	26
21.	Enrolled in more credit hours	31	37	19	14
22.	Used time saved to work harder in graded courses	51	30	13	6

23. How do you feel about the proposal to eliminate the Credit/No credit option at KSU?
    Opposed, exploration of new areas = 66 No Opinion/Don't Care = 7
    Opposed, need a goof-off course = 15 Favor Eliminating = 7
    Opposed, for other reasons = 2 Strongly Favor Eliminating = 3

Reactions to the 9 Week Deadline for the Withdrawal Period:

		No	Yes	Yes, Several times	Undecided
24.	Used time to "try-out" courses	65	29	7	-
25.	Postponed withdrawal more than 3 weeks	78	19	3	-
26.	Avoided low grades by dropping course	55	40	6	-
27.	Registered for more credits than if shorter	79	21	-	-
28.	Should withdrawal period be shortened?	83	4	-	12

Reactions to the "re-take" Policy:

29. Have you re-taken courses to improve your grade? Yes=23 No=77
30. Comparison of the second grade with the first:
    2-3 letter grades higher = 55 1 letter grade higher = 40 same grade = 5
31. Should the "re-take" policy be repealed? Yes=7 No=86 Undecided=7

GPA of Respondents:

		less than 2.5	2.50-2.99	3.00-3.49	3.50 or over
32.	Overall GPA	19	33	30	18
33.	GPA in your Academic Major	8	25	34	27

36. Have you asked friends about a Professor's grading standards before enrolling in that course? Yes=49 Yes, Several Times=35 No=16

Effect of Professor's Grading Standards on your enrollment decision:

		Encouraged	No Effect	Discouraged
37.	Professor with "Easy" Reputation	65	33	1
38.	Professor with "Hard" Reputation	2	47	49

39. Class in College: Sophomore=24 Junior=26 Senior=48

TABLE 6

EFFECT OF GRADING PRACTICES AND POLICIES AT KSU
ON GROUPS OF STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT GRADE POINT AVERAGES
(All data given in percentages)

	Comparison of GPA Groups <2.50 / 2.50-2.99 / 3.00+ Probability
1. How do you regard "grade inflation" at KSU?	NS
Tightening KSU Grading Standards would affect:	
2. Academic motivation and effort	NS
3. Overall satisfaction with KSU	NS
4. Credit hour load attempted	NS
5. Desire to take credit/no credit courses	***
6. Interest in repeating courses where the first grade was disappointing	NS
7. Willingness to recommend KSU to friends	NS
8. Satisfaction with the academic challenge at KSU	NS

*** χ^2 significant, $p < .001$ (see details below)

Factors Perceived Differently by the Three Groups of Students:

	Comparison of GPA Groups		
	Increase <2.5/2.5-2.9/3.0+	No Effect <2.5/2.5-2.9/3.0+	Decrease <2.5/2.5-2.9/3.0+
5. Desire to take credit/no credit courses	72/58/59	17/40/39	10/ 2/ 1

Assuming a Drop in Average GPA, How Likely Is?

	Comparison of GPA Groups				
	Quite Likely	Possibly	Not Likely	Can't Say	Probabil.
9. Danger of probation or dismissal	14/ 3/ 1	48/15/ 1	32/80/98	6/ 2/ 0	***
10. Transfer to another school	3/ 1/ 0	18/12/ 6	69/81/91	10/ 6/ 2	**
11. Rejection by Graduate or Professional School	17/22/ 5	44/41/30	13/22/56	26/15/ 9	***
12. Job rejection	9/12/ 4	46/34/24	22/36/60	23/17/13	***

	Comparison of GPA Groups Probability
13. Have you personally tried to influence your instructor for a good grade	NS
How are Teaching Effectiveness Ratings of your Instructors Affected?	
14. Lenient Grading	NS
15. Harsh Grading	NS
Enrollment in Non-graded Courses:	
16. Have you enrolled in non-graded courses	NS
17. Number of non-graded courses taken	NS

** χ^2 significant, $p < .01$
*** χ^2 significant, $p < .001$
NS no significant difference between comparison groups

TABLE 6A

EFFECT OF GRADING PRACTICES AND POLICIES AT KSU
ON GROUPS OF STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT GRADE POINT AVERAGES
(All data given in percentages)

Reactions to Experiences with Non-graded Courses:

	Comparison of GPA Groups <2.50 / 2.50-2.99 / 3.00+				
	Definitely True	More True	More False	Definitely False	Probabil.
18. Expended less effort in non-graded courses					NS
19. Expected a poor grade in the non-graded course (if taken for a grade)	28/20/12	40/33/31	23/30/32	9/17/26	*
20. Would not have taken courses if credit/no credit were not available					NS
21. Enrolled in more hours with non-graded courses					NS
22. Worked harder on graded courses, with time saved from non-graded courses					NS
23. Reactions to the proposal to eliminate the credit/no credit option at KSU					NS

Reactions to the 9 Week Withdrawal Period:

	Comparison of GPA Groups			
	Yes	Several Times	No	Probabil.
24. Used time to try-out courses	35/29/26	10/10/ 3	55/61/72	*
25. Postponed withdrawal	29/23/11	7/ 3/ 1	64/74/88	***
26. Avoided low grades by dropping course	57/44/28	15/ 7/ 1	28/49/70	***

	Yes	No	Probabil.
27. Registered for more credits than if period were shorter	34/21/16	66/79/84	**

	Yes	No	Undecided	Probabil.
28. Should withdrawal period be shortened?	3/ 1/ 7	84/91/77	13/ 8/16	*

Reactions to Re-take Policy:

	Comparison of GPA Groups		
	Yes	No	Probabil.
29. Have re-taken at least one course to improve grade	46/26/11	54/74/89	***
30. Comparison of second grade with first grade			NS
31. Should the re-take policy be repealed?			NS
36. Asked friends about Professor's grading standards?			NS

If yes, How has professor's reputation affected your enrollment decision?

	Comparison of GPA Groups			
	Encouraged	No Effect	Discouraged	Probabil.
37. Professor with "Easy Reputation"	71/74/55	25/22/44	2/ 1/ 0	**
38. Professor with "Hard Reputation"				NS

* χ^2 significant, $p < .05$
** χ^2 significant, $p < .01$
*** χ^2 significant, $p < .001$
NS non significant differences between comparison groups

TABLE 7

EFFECT OF GRADING PRACTICES ON STUDENTS AT KSU
WITH DIFFERENT GRADE POINT AVERAGES IN THEIR MAJOR
(All data given in percentages)

	Comparison of GPA Groups <3.00 / 3.00-3.49 / 3.50+ Probability
1. How do you regard "grade inflation" at KSU?	NS
Tightening KSU Grading Standards would affect:	
2. Academic motivation and effort	NS
3. Overall satisfaction with KSU	NS
4. Credit hour load attempted	NS
5. Desire to take credit/no credit courses	**
6. Interest in repeating courses where the first grade was disappointing	*
7. Willingness to recommend KSU to friends	NS
8. Satisfaction with the academic challenge at KSU	*

* χ^2 significant, $p < .05$ (see details below)
** χ^2 significant, $p < .01$ (see details below)

Factors Perceived Differently by the Three Groups of Students:

	Comparison of GPA Groups		
	Increase	No Effect	Decrease
5. Desire to take credit/no credit courses	64/60/55	28/40/43	8/ 0/ 2
6. Interest in repeating courses to improve grade	46/39/41	32/46/51	21/15/ 8
8. Satisfaction with academic challenge at KSU	13/10/18	64/78/67	23/12/14

Assuming a Drop in Average GPA, How Likely Is?

	Comparison of GPA Groups				
	Quite Likely	Possibly	Not Likely	Can't Say	Probabil.
9. Danger of probation or dismissal	9/ 2/ 0	32/ 8/ 0	56/89/99	2/ 1/ 1	***
10. Transfer to another school	2/ 0/ 0	14/10/ 8	76/88/88	8/ 2/ 4	*
11. Rejection by Graduate or Professional School	18/16/ 3	46/38/24	14/34/66	22/12/ 7	***
12. Job rejection	10/ 9/ 4	38/33/19	27/47/68	25/12/ 8	***

	Comparison of GPA Groups		
	No	Yes	Probability
13. Have you attempted to personally influence your instructor for a good grade	68/74/90	28/22/ 7	**

How are Teaching Effectiveness Ratings of your Instructors Affected?

	Increase	Decrease	No Effect	Probability
14. Lenient Grading practices	27/21/11	10/13/19	64/66/69	*
15. Harsh Grading practices				NS

Enrollment in Non-graded Courses:

	Probability
16. Have you enrolled in non-graded courses	NS
17. Number of non-graded courses taken	NS

* χ^2 significant, $p < .05$
** χ^2 significant, $p < .01$
*** χ^2 significant, $p < .001$
NS no significant difference between comparison groups

TABLE 7A

EFFECT OF GRADING PRACTICES ON STUDENTS AT KSU
WITH DIFFERENT GRADE POINT AVERAGES IN THEIR MAJOR
(All data given in percentages)

Reactions to Experiences with Non-graded Courses:

		Comparison of GPA Groups <3.00 / 3.00-3.49 / 3.50+				
		Definitely True	More True	More False	Definitely False	Probabil.
18.	Expended less effort in non-graded courses	31/45/33	49/43/30	10/ 8/20	11/ 4/17	**
19.	Expected a poor grade in the non-graded course (if had been taken for a grade)					NS
20.	Would not have taken courses if credit/no credit option were not available	20/ 6/11	19/27/26	41/40/27	19/27/36	*
21.	Enrolled in more hours with non-graded courses					NS
22.	Worked harder on graded courses, with time saved from non-graded courses					NS
23.	Reactions to the proposal to eliminate the credit/no credit option at KSU					NS

Reactions to the 9 Week Withdrawal Period:

		Comparison of GPA Groups			
		Yes	Several Times	No	Probabil.
24.	Used period to try-out courses				NS
25.	Postponed withdrawal	24/18/ 9	7/ 1/ 1	69/81/90	***
26.	Avoided low grades by dropping course	53/34/28	10/ 5/ 0	37/61/72	***
27.	Registered for more credits than if the period were shorter	30/14/16	--	70/86/84	**

		Yes	No	Undecided	Probabil.
28.	Should withdrawal period be shortened?	2/ 2/ 9	88/84/75	10/14/16	*

Reactions to Re-take Policy:

		Comparison of GPA Groups		
		Yes	No	Probabil.
29.	Have re-taken at least one course to improve grade	40/17/ 9	60/83/91	***
30.	Comparison of second grade with first grade			NS
31.	Should the re-take policy be repealed?			NS
36.	Asked friends about Professor's grading standards?			NS

If yes, How has professor's reputation affected your enrollment decision?

		Comparison of GPA Groups			
		Encouraged	No Effect	Discouraged	Probabil.
37.	Professor with "Easy Reputation"	77/67/48	20/30/51	2/ 0/ 0	***
38.	Professor with "Hard Reputation"				NS

* significant, $p < .05$
** significant, $p < .01$
*** significant, $p < .001$
NS non significant differences between comparison groups

3. How do a teacher's grading standards affect students' perceptions of him/her?

Results from Questions 14 and 15 suggest that "lenient" grading practices will not "purchase" favorable student ratings, but "harsh" grading is likely to result in lower student ratings. At the same time, students tend to be attracted to courses where the professor reputedly grades "easy", and to stay away from those with a "hard" grading reputation (Questions 37 and 38).

There were no subgroup differences on the effect of "harsh" grading; and while the majority of all subgroups reported that "lenient" grading did not affect their ratings of teachers, those with the lowest grades in their major differed from those with the highest grades; 27 percent of the former and 11 percent of the latter said their ratings were higher for "lenient" graders. This contrasts with 11 percent of the former and 19 percent of the latter who said they gave adverse ratings to "lenient" graders. Professors with "easy" grading reputations were especially appealing to those with the lowest GPA's (Tables 6A and 7A).

4. What have been the consequences of taking non-graded courses?

A large majority reported neglecting their non-graded courses to a degree, using the time saved to work harder in graded courses and/or to take a heavier than "normal" course load (Questions 18, 21, and 22). About half selected the non-graded option for courses in which they expected a low grade (Question 19), and 37 percent took courses they would not have taken if the non-graded option were discontinued (Question 20).

Only a few subgroup differences were found on these questions, and none of these represented a substantial departure from the overall results. Those with the highest grades in their major field were somewhat more likely than other groups to work harder on ungraded courses and to use the option to explore interests outside their major field. Those with the highest overall GPA's were less likely than other groups to select courses for credit/no credit on the basis of an estimate of the course's difficulty.

5. How have students used the long period allowing course withdrawal with no penalty?

Almost half have used this opportunity to avoid a low grade. Over one-third have used it to "explore" or "try-out" courses. About 20 percent reported that they enroll in far more courses because of this policy, and a similar number said that they posponed withdrawing from courses which they were certain they would not complete (Questions 24-27).

Answers to these questions varied with the level of previous academic achievement. In every instance, those with the lowest GPA were most likely to use the lengthy withdrawal period for each of the four purposes reviewed above (Tables 6A and 7A).

6. What has been the impact of the "re-take" policy?

Slightly less than one-fourth of the respondents reported re-taking one or more courses. In 55 percent of those cases, an improvement of two or three letter grades was reported. The grade was increased by one letter for 40 percent, while no change was reported by only 5 percent.

As might be expected, the re-take opportunity was exercised most frequently by those in the lowest GPA groups. About 40 percent of the lowest group used the re-take opportunity, compared with 10 percent of the highest group.

7. How do students feel about rescinding these three policies?

By very substantial margins, students favored continuing policies with respect to credit/no credit courses (83 percent vs. 10 percent opposed), the extended (9-week) withdrawal period (83 percent vs. 4 percent opposed), and the re-take opportunity (86 percent vs. 7 percent opposed).

Generally, student reactions to these questions were uniform across groups. A minor exception occurred on the 9-week withdrawal question; students with the best grades were slightly less likely to endorse the continuation of this policy than were those with lower grades. Nevertheless, over 75 percent of the highest GPA group recommended continuation, while less than 10 percent recommended a shorter withdrawal period.

DISCUSSION

Obviously, one cannot "prove" cause and effect by asking for opinions. Nor can one be certain that reports made on questionnaires are truthful or objective, even under conditions of anonymous reporting. Nonetheless, judgments must often be made on the basis of less than perfect information. The reported experiences and attitudes of representative students and faculty members, summarized in this report, are probably best regarded as relevant, if imperfect, guides to policy making with respect to "grade inflation" at KSU.

What "caused" grade inflation? Probably a number of factors. It appears to be an artifact of various academic policies. If there were a shortened period for dropping courses, if the credit/no credit option were rescinded, or if the re-take policy were repealed, GPA's at KSU would almost certainly decrease. These policies were established to encourage students to seek broad academic experiences and to accept difficult academic challenges. They also helped maximize student opportunities to succeed academically. Such goals are as worthy today as they were when the policies were initiated. Increased GPA's have been a side effect of these policies.

While rescinding these policies would reduce GPA's and, thereby, create the impression of increasing academic standards, it is important to ask what basic differences this would make. Would student achievement be improved? Would more academic challenges be accepted? Would academic exploration be increased? Would student morale be improved? Would students feel they were treated more justly?

This study does not provide definitive answers to such questions. According to students, non-graded courses are advantageous because they permit more effort to be concentrated on graded courses (81 percent of respondents), they allow heavier academic loads (68 percent), they permit students to avoid low grades (51 percent), and they encourage academic breadth (37 percent). The lengthy "course withdrawal" period was used to avoid low grades (46 percent), explore courses of doubtful interest (36 percent), and attempt an unusually heavy academic load (21 percent). Clearly, both policies had effects beyond those originally intended, including effects on overall grade point averages. The effects cited all either promoted breadth of academic experience, or "protected" the academic record. Therefore, it may be inferred that rescinding these policies might narrow academic experiences and reduce grade averages. The absolute level of student achievement (how much students learned) would not necessarily be affected.

These observations imply that there is little to be gained, and perhaps much to be lost by changing the policies in question. Apparently, faculty members and especially students, agreed with this viewpoint, since the majority recommended no change. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the survey did not (and probably could not) examine all potentially negative side effects. Did students "learn" to make more commitments than they could honor (since they could change their minds later)? Did they develop habits of "just getting by", because an A and a D are both recorded as "CR" on the transcript? Did they develop expectations that their "record" in life will not include their failures or their mediocre successes? Policy makers will need to ponder these unanswered questions as well as those for which relevant information was supplied. It may be necessary eventually to weigh the relative educational merit of encouraging breadth of study and experience with difficult academic challenges as opposed to encouraging irresponsibility and academic indolence. Is it better to expand opportunities (and thereby "invite" abuses) or to curtail both abuses and opportunities?

Respondents made it clear that grade inflation was more than an "artifact" arising from particular policies. There was a strongly implied belief that academic standards themselves have been lowered. While multiple causes were cited, the most prominent ones were the belief that student ratings of faculty members would be adversely affected by strict grading, the belief that making "hard" evaluative judgments will inhibit desirable "teaching/helping" relationships, and the concern that strict standards may reduce enrollments, and thus, the number of faculty positions.

Regarding the impact of "student evaluation of instruction" programs and the "reduced enrollment" problem, most faculty members denied that such considerations affected them personally (even though they thought their colleagues' grades were affected). Student responses indicated that faculty were not likely to be successful in "buying" good ratings with lenient grades. "Harsh" graders (regrettably, an undefined term) should, however, be prepared for some adverse ratings purely on the basis of their grading standards. In general, students felt it unlikely that tighter grading standards would affect their enrollment status. These results suggest that faculty members need not fear establishing grading practices which do not depart markedly from those in general use. It seems unlikely that enrollment would be significantly affected, nor would student ratings of instructors be adversely affected.

Would a conscious attempt to "tighten" grading standards have any noticeable effects at KSU? Very possibly. Most of the faculty thought there would be three "good things" which would happen--KSU's academic reputation would be improved, students' academic motivation and effort would be increased, and students would receive a more realistic appraisal of their competitive potential. Students agreed that academic effort and motivation would probably increase, and that there would be some increase in satisfaction with the academic challenge at KSU. However, they felt that overall satisfaction with KSU would decline, probably in part because many felt that their long range vocational and educational plans might be thwarted. Such a change would apparently heighten interest in credit/no credit courses and would encourage more course "repeats". It would probably also reduce the average number of credits attempted (and thus FTE enrollment, and thus the number of faculty positions "justified" under current funding procedures).

Academic freedom is a prized tradition in higher education. In addition to freedom to inquire into any question and to express any view, this tradition has been interpreted to mean freedom to select content, employ teaching methods, and establish evaluation standards. Instituting more uniform grading policies would probably be perceived as an unwarranted intrusion into academic freedom. Policy makers will need to be aware of this as well as other probable consequences of changing the individual faculty member's prerogatives with respect to grading.

A theoretical alternative involves separating the evaluation and the instructional functions. If evaluation were a separate process, the faculty member would be relieved of the conflict between the roles of "teacher/helper" and "evaluator/judge". There is something inherently appealing about an arrangement which puts the faculty member squarely in the student's corner, so that both are exclusively concerned with the latter's success. On the other hand, the dangers of "teaching for the test" and the advantages of having the instructor select the objectives offer impressive counter arguments.

Academic planning and policy making requires consideration of a complex set of facts, assumptions, and philosophies. This report has reviewed some of the background necessary for thoughtful consideration of the "grade inflation" problem.

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APPENDIX

Faculty Experiences With Grading Practices

Office of Educational Research
Kansas State University

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Directions

Your assistance is needed to help the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate consider policy recommendations regarding grading at KSU. Because candor is essential, please do not identify yourself.

This type of faculty input can be influential in policy matters if the percentage who reply is large. Hopefully, you will be able to take 10 minutes or so to respond right now (before the request gets buried).

(1-20) A number of factors, other than student achievement, have been said to influence grades in undergraduate courses at KSU. Some of these are listed below. In Column 1, indicate the degree to which you feel each factor influences undergraduate grades at KSU. Then in Column 2 indicate the degree to which you feel each factor influenced the grades you awarded in undergraduate courses last year. To make these ratings, use the following code:

1 = Of no importance
2 = Of some influence
3 = A substantial influence

? = I have no idea.
N = I taught no undergraduate courses last year.

	Column 1 University	Column 2 Personally
The high emphasis graduate and professional school admission policies place on undergraduate GPA	(1) ___	(11) ___
Critiques of the grading system which denigrate the significance of grades (grades are imprecise, inconsistent, not predictive of success in life, etc.).	(2) ___	(12) ___
Conflict between the faculty member's role of "teacher/helper" and that of "evaluator/judge"	(3) ___	(13) ___
The system which ties faculty positions to enrollment (and thus "flunk-outs" to position retrenchment)	(4) ___	(14) ___
The belief that students will give more favorable teacher ratings if their grades are higher.	(5) ___	(15) ___
The credit/no credit option which students have for courses outside their major area.	(6) ___	(16) ___
The opportunity for students to withdraw with no grade through the first 9 weeks of a term	(7) ___	(17) ___
The opportunity for students to re-take any course and have only the most recent grade count in the GPA	(8) ___	(18) ___
The use of "contract grading" whereby the achievement level required for a given grade is specified in advance.	(9) ___	(19) ___
The proliferation of courses designed to relate the discipline to broad social issues (or to otherwise increase "relevance")	(10) ___	(20) ___

(OVER, PLEASE)

(21-26) A number of arguments have been advanced "for" and "against" developing new policies for tightening grading standards at KSU. How do you regard each of the following arguments?

	Convincing	Worth Considering	Not Convincing
21. Tighter standards will enhance our reputation as an academic institution and will thus aid student recruitment.	___	___	___
22. Tighter standards will be unfair to KSU graduates seeking admission to graduate or professional schools since other institutions will probably not "deflate" their grades	___	___	___
23. Tighter standards will serve to rekindle academic effort and motivation among KSU students	___	___	___
24. Tighter standards will encourage many KSU students to enroll in less demanding institutions	___	___	___
25. Tighter standards will give students a more realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the world	___	___	___
26. Tighter standards will discourage students from exploring academic interests outside their area of concentration.	___	___	___

(27-29) Mention was made earlier of three academic policies which KSU has adopted in recent years. How do you react to the suggestion that these policies be rescinded? Why?

27. The policy which permits students to take non-graded courses outside their major area.

___(1) Favor rescinding ___(2) Favor continuing ___(3) Undecided or don't care.

Reason(s):_____

_____

28. The policy which permits students to withdraw with no grade through the first nine weeks of a semester.

___(1) Favor rescinding ___(2) Favor continuing ___(3) Undecided or don't care.

Reason(s):_____

_____

29. The policy which permits students to re-take any course and have only the last grade count in the GPA.

___(1) Favor rescinding ___(2) Favor continuing ___(3) Undecided or don't care.

Reason(s):_____

_____

30. Do you feel that the "grade inflation" we are experiencing at KSU is:
___(1) A bad thing. ___(2) A good thing. ___(3) Neither bad nor good. ___(4) No opinion.

31. It has been suggested that, in addition to recording a letter grade on the transcript, the Registrar should also record the percentage of grades below that reported for the student. (Thus, if half of the class received "A" grades, a "50" would be recorded for an "A" student; if 20% received A's, an "80" would be recorded for an A student.) How do you feel about this suggestion?
___(1) Strongly favor it. ___(2) I'm inclined to favor it. ___(3) Undecided ___(4) I'm inclined to oppose it. ___(5) Strongly opposed.

Thank you for your assistance. Please return the completed form in the pre-addressed envelope which has been provided.

Student Reactions to Grading Policies

Office of Educational Research
Kansas State University

C O N F I D E N T I A L

The Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate has been asked to review grading policies at KSU and to recommend changes they deem necessary. As part of that review, the Committee would like to know about relevant student experiences and attitudes. Please respond to the questions on this form; to encourage candor, do not identify yourself. A summary of results for all student respondents will be sent to the Committee.

1. A recent study shows that grade averages at KSU have increased dramatically in the past decade, with no corresponding change in students' academic qualifications. Do you regard this "grade inflation" as:
___(1) a bad thing? ___(2) a good thing? ___(3)neither bad nor good? ___(4) no opinion.

2-8. If KSU grading standards were noticeably tighter (e. g., the average grade was reduced by .5 grade point), how would that affect:

	(1) Increase it	(2) No Effect	(3) Decrease it
2. Your academic motivation and effort?	___	___	___
3. Your overall satisfaction with KSU?.	___	___	___
4. The credit hour load you would attempt?. . . .	___	___	___
5. Your desire to take credit/no credit courses?.	___	___	___
6. Your interest in repeating courses in which your first grade was disappointing	___	___	___
7. Your willingness to recommend KSU to friends?.	___	___	___
8. Your satisfaction with the academic challenge at KSU?	___	___	___

9-12. Again, assuming the average GPA at KSU dropped by 0.5 due to an increase in academic standards, how likely do you think it is that you:

	(1) Quite Likely	(2) Possibly	(3) Not Likely	(4) Can't Say
9. would be in danger of going on probation or being dismissed?	___	___	___	___
10. would transfer to an institution which made fewer academic demands?	___	___	___	___
11. would be rejected as an applicant to the graduate or professional school of your choice?	___	___	___	___
12. would be rejected for a job you were seeking? .	___	___	___	___

13. Have you personally tried to influence your grade in a course by telling your instructor how vital a good grade was to you?
___(1) No. ___(2) Yes, once or twice. ___(3) Yes, more than twice.

14-15. When rating the teaching effectiveness of your instructors, how are your ratings affected by:

	(1) Ratings Increase	(2) Ratings Decrease	(3) No Effect
14. tendencies for instructors to grade leniently?.	___	___	___
15. tendencies for instructors to grade harshly?. .	___	___	___

16. Have you enrolled in any "non-graded courses"(credit/no credit) at KSU?
___(1) Yes. ___(2) No.

17. If "Yes", how many? (Count this semester's enrollment) ___
(If you have not enrolled in a non-graded course at KSU, skip to Question 23, back side)

(OVER, PLEASE)

18-22. React to the following statements on the basis of your experience with non-graded courses. (NOTE: DT = Definitely true; MT = More true than false; MF = More false than true; DF = Definitely false).

	(1)DT	(2)MT	(3)MF	(4)DF
18. I put less effort into non-graded courses than was true for the average graded course	___	___	___	___
19. For the most part, my non-graded courses were ones in which I expected poor grades.	___	___	___	___
20. My non-graded courses were generally ones I would not have taken if the "non-grade" option were not available.	___	___	___	___
21. I tended to enroll in more hours when one of my courses was non-graded.	___	___	___	___
22. When I had a non-graded course, I used the time saved on it to work harder on my graded courses	___	___	___	___

23. How would you feel about a proposal to eliminate the credit/no credit option at KSU?

___(1) Oppose mainly on the grounds that I would be afraid to explore some areas without cr/no cr. grading.
___(2) Oppose mainly on the grounds that at least occasionally I need a course where I can "goof off" without fear of ruining my GPA.
___(3) No opinion or don't care.
___(4) Inclined to favor eliminating cr/no cr. grading.
___(5) Strongly favor eliminating the credit/no credit option.

24-31. KSU has recently adopted policies which (a) allow students to drop courses with no grade through the first 9 weeks and (b) permit students to re-take courses and have only the second grade count in their grade point average. Regarding the 9 week deadline for withdrawing with no grade:

24. Have you used this opportunity to "try-out" courses before you decide on a definite schedule? ___(1) Yes, once or twice. ___(2) Yes, more than twice. ___(3) No.
25. Have you postponed withdrawal from courses which you knew you would drop after trying them for 3 weeks or less? ___(1) Yes, 1-2 times. ___(2) Yes, more than twice. ___(3) No.
26. Have you been able to avoid some low grades by dropping a course after mid-term? ___(1) Yes, once or twice ___(2) Yes, more than twice ___(3) No
27. Have you registered for more credits than you would if the withdrawal period were noticeably shorter? ___(1) Yes ___(2) No
28. Do you think the "withdrawal/no grade" period should be shortened, perhaps to 3 weeks? ___(1) Yes ___(2) No ___(3) Undecided

Regarding the re-take policy

29. Have you exercised the option of re-taking at least one course in order to improve your grade? ___(1) Yes ___(2) No
30. If "Yes", how did the second grade compare with the first? ___(1) 2-3 grades higher. ___(2) one grade higher. ___(3) same. ___(4) lower.
31. Do you think the re-take policy should be repealed? ___(1) Yes ___(2) No ___(3) Undecided; don't care.

32-33. In Column 1 below, check your overall GPA for courses taken to date at KSU. In Column 2, give your GPA for courses taken at KSU in your major field.

34-37. How many credit hours are included in:
34-35 (a) Your overall GPA?___
36-37 (b) The GPA in your major field?___

	32. Column 1 Overall	33. Column 2 Major
5) 3.50 or higher	___	___
4) 3.00-3.49	___	___
3) 2.50-2.99	___	___
2) 2.00-2.49	___	___
1) Under 2.00	___	___
N) None as yet	___	___

38. Before enrolling in a course, have you ever asked your friends about the professor's grading standards? ___(1) Yes, once or twice. ___(2) Yes, more than twice. ___(3) No.

39-40. If "Yes", how has the professor's reputation for grading affected your decision to enroll in his/her course?

	39. "Easy" reputation	40. "Hard" reputation
(1) Encouraged me	___	___
(2) No effect	___	___
(3) Discouraged me	___	___
(4) No experience	___	___

Thank you for your assistance. Please return the completed form to the secretary in Room 215.